

# SHEL'S SHORTS

BY SHEL SILVERSTEIN



DRAMATISTS  
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SHEL'S SHORTS was originally produced in repertory as two separate evenings under the titles SHEL'S SHORTS: SIGNS OF TROUBLE and SHEL'S SHORTS: SHEL SHOCKED by the Market Theater in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in December 2001.

SHEL'S SHORTS: SIGNS OF TROUBLE was directed by Wesley Savick; the set design was by Caleb Wertenbaker; the lighting design was by Herrick Goldman; the sound design and original music were by J. Hagenbuckle; and the costumes were by Gail Astrid. The cast was as follows: Neil A. Casey, Stephanie Clayman, Marin Ireland, John Kuntz, Laura Latreille and Robert Pemberton.

SHEL'S SHORTS: SHEL SHOCKED was directed by Larry Coen; the set design was by Caleb Wertenbaker; the lighting design was by Karen Perlow; the sound design and original music were by J. Hagenbuckle; and the costumes were by Harriet Voyt. The cast was as follows: Neil A. Casey, Stephanie Clayman, Marin Ireland, John Kuntz, Laura Latreille and Robert Pemberton.

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# SHEL'S SHORTS

# DREAMERS

*Nick works on sink drain. Ritchie sits on edge of tub.*

RITCHIE. I'll tell you something — that son-of-a-bitch gives me a nervous stomach.

NICK. You let him get to you. I wouldn't give him the satisfaction.

RITCHIE. How do you not let him get to you when he pulls that arbitration compensation shit? How does he expect me to work after that?

NICK. He don't give a damn if you work or not. He hopes you fuck off and get fired and starve to death.

RITCHIE. Then he'd hear from me about some compensation.

NICK. He wouldn't hear nothin' from you — you'd be dead.

Gimme that bucket. *(Ritchie hands it to him.)* Gimme that crescent wrench. *(Ritchie hands it to him — Nick begins to unscrew plug.)*

RITCHIE. It's that fuckin' Sorenson — he gives me a nervous stomach.

NICK. It's that fuckin' Sorenson and it's the fuckin' union, it's the fuckin' weather, it's the fuckin' wrench, it's the fuckin' everything — You got a wild hair up your ass or somethin'? *(Nick takes plug out and examines it.)*

RITCHIE. I don't know, maybe it's the pressure of the work — *(He goes to medicine cabinet — opens it and begins to examine pills.)*

NICK. The pressure of the work? The pressure of the profession? The stress associated with —

RITCHIE. I don't sleep. I don't know what it is.

NICK. I sleep too much. Carole says it ain't normal. Come home — eat supper — a little TV — and out. She says to me, "Is this all there is?" Like the song — *(He sings.)* "Is this all there is?" Jesus — look at this — *(He begins to pull various items out of sink trap — hairpins, toothpaste caps, a hair curler, four bobby pins, a Tampax, a toothbrush, a rubber, and a great blob of matted hair — he finds a ring, which he wipes off and casually puts into his pocket.)*



RITCHIE. At least you sleep — I don't sleep. I keep havin' weird dreams.

NICK. If you don't sleep how can you have dreams?

RITCHIE. When I do sleep — for a minute I have these strange dreams.

NICK. What kind of strange?

RITCHIE. You know — strange.

NICK. There are lots of kinds of strange — you mean — scary or sick or what?

RITCHIE. I'm embarrassed to discuss it.

NICK. What's to be embarrassed about? It's just a dream. (*Wiping out plug and examining it.*) These threads are shot.

RITCHIE. A weird dream.

NICK. What? Did you screw a cow? (*He laughs.*)

RITCHIE. *Worse.*

NICK. You screwed a bull.

RITCHIE. You're gettin' closer.

NICK. Well, what? Did you screw a dead rat? Gimme a piece of that Teflon tape. (*Ritchie tears off tape and hands it to him — Nick wraps tape around threads of plug and screws plug back in.*)

RITCHIE. I fucked a guy.

NICK. What guy?

RITCHIE. I don't know.

NICK. You don't know — hey, Ritchie, you first oughta ask a guy's name before you fuck him. (*He giggles.*)

RITCHIE. Y'see, you son-of-a-bitch, that's why I didn't want to tell you — I *knew* you'd do this shit.

NICK. Okay — I'm sorry — what's he look like?

RITCHIE. Forget it — I shouldn't of said a fuckin' word.

NICK. I was kiddin' — I shouldn't have kidded you — bad taste — I'm sorry. How did it happen? I mean, where were you? — where were you?

RITCHIE. I don't know — I think out in the country or somewhere.

NICK. And what happened? He just walked up to you and —

RITCHIE. He didn't walk up to me — we were just — shit, it was only a dream.

NICK. That's right — so what are you gettin' so pissed off at? You

were just what?

RITCHIE. What?

NICK. You said you were just —

RITCHIE. We were just talkin' — I think he was holding a book or something.

NICK. And then he grabbed your cock —

RITCHIE. No, it was just sort of vague — You know, like a dream. One minute we're talkin' and the next minute we're —

NICK. Fuckin'.

RITCHIE. We're naked — sort of wrestlin' around on the ground.

NICK. Naked.

RITCHIE. Yeah.

NICK. And then you started fuckin'.

RITCHIE. No, we just rolled around on the grass and hugged each other and laughed a lot —

NICK. Well, when did you start fuckin'?

RITCHIE. We never really started fuckin'.

NICK. (*Impatiently.*) You said you started fuckin'. You said you fucked a guy —

RITCHIE. Well, it was like we were gonna — I was gonna — but I didn't quite do it. You know in dreams — how you're almost about to do somethin' and you never quite —

NICK. But did you *want* to do it?

RITCHIE. I guess so — maybe not — I don't know — Maybe I didn't want to do it —

NICK. So what's the big deal? If you didn't want to do it and you didn't do it, what's the big damn deal? Turn on the water. (*Ritchie turns on water.*)

RITCHIE. I didn't say I didn't want to do it — in the dream — I don't know if I wanted to do it — I woke up.

NICK. Before anything happened?

RITCHIE. I told you, nothing happened.

NICK. Did you have a hard-on? (*Nick stands up and examines faucets.*)

RITCHIE. When?

NICK. When you woke up — or in the dream — did you have a hard-on?

RITCHIE. When — In the dream? — I don't know.

NICK. What about when you woke up?

RITCHIE. I don't know. I think maybe.

NICK. Maybe? You either wake up with a hard-on or you wake up without a hard-on.

RITCHIE. Sometimes it's sort of — in-between.

NICK. So you woke up with a hard-on — semi-hard —

RITCHIE. Yeah, I guess so.

NICK. But you didn't come.

RITCHIE. No, I didn't come — what the hell difference does that make?

NICK. It makes a lot of difference — If you come or don't come —

RITCHIE. Well, I didn't.

NICK. I mean like sometimes you wake up and there's a little drop of come at the end of your dick?

RITCHIE. What the fuck is the difference if I came or not? We rolled around on the grass and we hugged. That was enough.

NICK. And you were laughin'.

RITCHIE. Yeah.

NICK. What were you laughin' about?

RITCHIE. I don't know. How the hell do I know what we were laughin' about? What are you, some kind of psychologist? I told you what happened — it was just a fuckin' dream.

NICK. Correction — it was a non-fuckin' dream.

RITCHIE. Right — it was a non-fuckin' dream.

NICK. Did he look like anybody you know? Shut off that cold water.

RITCHIE. (*Under sink, turning off.*) It won't shut off.

NICK. Shit. (*He gets back under sink and tries to turn it off. He mutters obscenities.*)

RITCHIE. I don't remember what he looked like. What's the difference what he looked like?

NICK. Well, it could be symbolic — you know, like the guy represents the union — or Sorenson — and —

RITCHIE. It wasn't Sorenson — that's for sure.

NICK. Or the guy represents the union — and it's symbolic because you think the union's fuckin' you — so it's not like the guy is a real guy — it's like he's the union.

RITCHIE. I said the union is fuckin' me. That's not the same as

me fuckin' the union.

NICK. It could be you gettin' back at the union for fuckin' you — by fuckin' the union, it's symbolic.

RITCHIE. You know what I read in a magazine? I read that all dreams you dream 'cause you want to do it but you're afraid to really do it so you just dream it.

NICK. That's a crock of shit.

RITCHIE. That's what I read.

NICK. That's what you read — so you have one dream where you're not even fuckin' some guy and you scare yourself into thinkin' you're a faggot —

RITCHIE. It's just what I read.

NICK. And you think you're a faggot.

RITCHIE. I don't want it to be wish fulfillment, for chrissake.

NICK. It ain't wish fulfillment, Ritchie — it's a dream — it symbolizes somethin'. It could symbolize you fuckin' the government on your income tax —

RITCHIE. And the guy is the government?

NICK. He could be.

RITCHIE. Okay, then answer me this — Why wasn't the government a girl? In the dream — why was it a guy? Why wasn't it a girl — like the Statue of Liberty — she symbolizes the government — Why was it a guy?

NICK. Hey, Uncle Sam symbolizes the government — eh? eh?

RITCHIE. Uncle Sam?

NICK. It could be. He could be the guy you said you sold your Chevy to last year — you knew the transmission was all messed up but you sold it to him without tellin' him so maybe it's you're guilty about fuckin' him on the deal, so you dream about it.

RITCHIE. It wasn't the guy I sold my Chevy to — It was just some guy who — never mind.

NICK. You think you're a faggot? You do. You have one dumb dream and you're ready to go have a sex change operation. I'm gonna have to break the fuckin' riser to get to the shut-off — Shit — gimme that hammer — *(Ritchie hands it to him.)* Gimme the chisel — *(Ritchie hands it to him — he begins to knock a hole in the wall tile.)*

RITCHIE. Hey, it's just that it seemed so damn real — and when I —

NICK. Here — *(He unzips his fly and takes out his dick.)* Here, look at this.

RITCHIE. What the hell are you doin', Nick?

NICK. I'm showin' you my dick — If you're a faggot you're gonna wanna grab it or suck it — do you wanna grab it or suck it?

RITCHIE. Nicky — they see you doin' that, they're gonna think you —

NICK. *Do you wanna grab or suck it?*

RITCHIE. No, for God's sake.

NICK. Okay — now feel your own dick. Feel your own dick — see if it gave you a hard-on.

RITCHIE. Nick, the lady walks in here and sees you with your dick out — and me feelin' my own dick. She's gonna — have a —

NICK. After what we just pulled out of her sink she's not gonna say nothin' — now feel your own dick — or do I have to feel it for you?

RITCHIE. Jesus — *(He feels his dick.)*

NICK. Is it hard?

RITCHIE. No.

NICK. Okay — Subject closed. *(Reaches through hole.)* Damn. This shut-off is stripped — Mother of God — *(He keeps trying to turn it, muttering.)* Hey — that would have been good, if Sorenson seen us grabbin' each other's dicks in here — he'd of really been on your case. Eh? eh? I'll tell you what — I'll bet I just saved you a fuckin' fortune in psychiatrist's bills — seriously, you let those things fester inside your mind, they can grow like a cancer and the next thing you know you *are* a faggot. It's no good — you're gonna have to go down and shut off the riser in the basement — wait a minute — I *got* it — Ha-ha — *(He turns it.)* Jesus, just because you dream something that doesn't mean you want to do it, for God's sake. You know what I dreamt about last week? You know what I dreamt about? I dreamt about fuckin' my daughter — my own daughter — Gimme the big Stillson — *(Ritchie hands him wrench — he turns wrench.)*

RITCHIE. Karen?

NICK. Francie.

RITCHIE. The younger one?

NICK. What if it was the older one? It was a dream. You think I wanna fuck my own daughter? Even the older one? I'd kill any-

body who fucked my daughter. It was symbolic —

RITCHIE. Of what?

NICK. How the hell do I know that? I'm no fuckin' psychiatrist. Maybe it was that she was my youth — escaping me — maybe she was like something I was striving for.

RITCHIE. Striving for.

NICK. Like say — she's the dispatcher's job that I been tryin' to get.

RITCHIE. The dispatcher's job?

NICK. Or Sorenson's job — or whatever. You don't think I wanna fuck my own daughter, do you?

RITCHIE. No.

NICK. You're damn right no. Sometimes I dream my father is alive and we're sittin' around havin' dinner.

RITCHIE. What does that symbolize?

NICK. What?

RITCHIE. Your father — what do you suppose he symbolizes?

NICK. I don't suppose — *(To pipe.)* You rotten motherfuckin' — *(Nipple breaks loose.)* Aha! *(He sticks his finger into riser and feels around.)* I don't suppose because I don't have the qualifications to suppose anything and neither do you — but we do have the qualifications to make ourselves into nervous wrecks by *supposing* —

RITCHIE. I suppose you're right.

NICK. Now you're supposing right — Don't suppose. Look at that rust buildup — It's a miracle any water got through at all — *(He begins to scrape out rust.)* Hey, you wanna hear another one? A couple of times I dreamt of fuckin' my mother — my own mother — Is that somethin' or is that somethin'? — She's always sittin' on the back porch and it's late at night and I'm a kid and I come home — and we do it — right there on the porch and she always says, "Quiet or you'll wake up your father." You think I wanna fuck my own mother? — Come on — it symbolizes something — It's a dream — did you save the pieces of those tiles?

RITCHIE. They're all busted up.

NICK. Mix up a little plaster and stick 'em back on — *(Ritchie mixes plaster and replaces tiles while Nick examines medicine cabinet.)* You dream a lot of things, Ritchie — you dream about fuckin' your daughter, you dream about fuckin' guys, you dream about fuckin' your pets, you dream about —

RITCHIE. Pets?

NICK. Everything — what's the difference? — It's all fuckin' symbolic.

RITCHIE. I suppose so.

NICK. I know so — you can't worry about every little dream —  
*(Nick turns on faucet and washes hands.)*

RITCHIE. I suppose not.

NICK. You can't let the little things bother you. *(Curtain.)*

# ALL COTTON

*Monique's Boutique. A sign says "All Cotton." Another says "All Sales Final — No Refunds." Jill stands looking at sign over blouses. Rachel approaches her.*

JILL. These are — all cotton?

RACHEL. One-hundred-percent combed cotton. We have them in some great colors. But I like the white best.

JILL. The shrinkage — that's what I'm thinking about.

RACHEL. It's non-shrink.

JILL. Guaranteed.

RACHEL. Absolutely. What are you, a five? *(She starts toward rack.)* I can show you the colors we have left —

JILL. I can show *you* — *(She opens jacket.)* *this* — *(She is wearing a tiny shrunken blouse.)*

RACHEL. What is that? Is that one of *ours*?

JILL. Non-shrink — one-hundred-percent cotton — the same blouse — guaranteed.

RACHEL. What size is that? If that's a *three* you can't expect —

JILL. Why would I buy a three? So I could look ridiculous and be uncomfortable? It's a *nine* — check the size.

RACHEL. *(Looking at size tag.)* Size — nine — boy, did that shrink. What did you wash it in?

JILL. Boiling chicken soup. What do you think I washed it in?

RACHEL. I've never seen *anything* shrink like that.

JILL. I washed it in cold water, gentle detergent — by *hand*.

RACHEL. Sometimes the *dryer* can ...

JILL. Dripped *dry* — I wouldn't put a forty-dollar blouse in a dryer.

RACHEL. Well, *something* shrunk the heck out of it.

JILL. *Something* like the cotton itself.

RACHEL. *Maybe*.

JILL. What *else*?



RACHEL. I don't know.

JILL. Well — I'm returning it — (*Takes it off.*)

RACHEL. (*Looking at tag.*) You're sure you got this here? I don't remember having this color.

JILL. You want to see the receipt?

RACHEL. No, it's not that I doubt you — I just don't remember seeing this color —

JILL. It *was* brighter.

RACHEL. Well I will need the receipt. The boss insists that I — (*Jill hands her the receipt.*) Uh — who waited on you? I don't recognize this ...

JILL. Are you suggesting that — somebody snuck in here — and sold me this shrinky, fadey blouse — without your permission?

RACHEL. I was only —

JILL. Well, what do you mean, who waited on me? A short woman with red hair.

RACHEL. *Red* hair?

JILL. Reddish — yes.

RACHEL. And this was ... (*Looks.*) when?

JILL. Tuesday — or Wednesday — it should say on the receipt.

RACHEL. Well, whoever it was didn't write the date. Probably Roxanne.

JILL. *Probably* Roxanne? Roxanne has red hair?

RACHEL. Roxanne's hair changes daily ... All right — I can give you another blouse — or credit on any other item — except for the jewelry.

JILL. By another blouse — you mean, another style?

RACHEL. This is the only style — on sale — I can't give you a non-sale item.

JILL. You mean I can have another of the guaranteed non-shrink blouses.

RACHEL. Well, sometimes *one* individual blouse will shrink — out of an entire shipment.

JILL. It's the cotton — if they're all of the same cotton, they're all going to shrink.

RACHEL. Well, I can credit you toward any other sale item.

JILL. What I'd like is my money back. I'd like the forty-two fifty.

RACHEL. I can't do that — (*Points to sign.*) I can apply the pur-

chase price toward any item of lesser or comparable —

JILL. You said *guaranteed*.

RACHEL. It is guaranteed — if it *wasn't* guaranteed we wouldn't credit the purchase price toward another item, would we?

JILL. *Guarantee* doesn't mean giving one credit toward another blouse of equal shrink potential —

RACHEL. Or toward any other non-sale item.

JILL. But this is the only sale item — apart from the jewelry.

RACHEL. I can't credit this toward jewelry.

JILL. Well — there you are — or here I am —

RACHEL. I wish I could do more for you.

JILL. You're not doing *anything* for me. You're offering me another useless blouse in return for *this* useless blouse.

RACHEL. This is not my shop. I am not Monique.

JILL. Oh, "This is not my shop — I'm not Monique" — so anything goes.

RACHEL. They do guarantee their products — based upon —

JILL. Oh *they* guarantee — *Their* products — a minute ago it was *we* guarantee — When I first walked in it was *I* guarantee — We're going backwards.

RACHEL. I can only do what I can do.

JILL. And I'll do what I can do.

RACHEL. I only work here.

JILL. You're — asking for trouble.

RACHEL. You can come back. The owner will be in on Wednesday — or Thursday.

JILL. Can you give me the owner's phone number? Monique's? I suppose you can't.

RACHEL. I can take *your* number and have *her* reach *you*.

JILL. Uh-huh — but you're not giving me my money back.

RACHEL. I can't do that — (*Points to sign.*)

JILL. All right — I've been very — civilized with you. And I'm not a civilized person — Not in *your* sense of the word.

RACHEL. I can't do something that I can't do.

JILL. I can do things — (*She leans toward Rachel.*)

RACHEL. What?

JILL. *Things* — things you don't want me to do.

RACHEL. Don't start any trouble in here.

JILL. I'm going to start trouble in here — I'm going to *make* trouble — *brew* trouble.

RACHEL. You'll get arrested.

JILL. For what? I'm not going to start any *fires* — slash any clothes — (*She makes a strange series of hand signs while moving her lips in unintelligible whispers. She reaches into her handbag. Rachel leaps back.*)

RACHEL. *Don't shoot me* — (*Jill comes out of handbag with a handful of sparkling confetti. She flings it at Rachel. Rachel screams — leaps back — realizes it was confetti and settles down.*)

JILL. There — it's done.

RACHEL. You — you messed up this floor.

JILL. The *floor*? *Ha* — I've messed up more than the floor — (*She chants.*)

I've messed up more  
Than your pretty floor  
Messed up more  
Than your chic little store  
Messed you up more  
Than you've seen before.

(*She laughs a strange cackling laugh.*)

RACHEL. *I'm* responsible for this — *I'm* the one who'll have to sweep this stuff up.

JILL. This *stuff*? This *stuff* will do you in. I'm going to tell you something. I'm a witch. It's true — I'm a *witch*. I just put a curse on you — and this store. I did. I don't usually throw curses — I'm a good witch — I do *white* magic. But you pissed me off. You did. Now I'm sorry I did it — But it's done. I don't like losing control — we're supposed to keep our cool ... Well — it's done.

RACHEL. And I have to sweep it up.

JILL. Stop worrying about sweeping it up. You have bigger things to worry about.

RACHEL. Really. (*She starts to sweep up confetti.*)

JILL. Yes, really ... Really ... You'd better ... *do* something.

RACHEL. I'm *doing* something.

JILL. I mean *do* something.

RACHEL. What?

JILL. I don't know ... Whatever people do — when they've been

cursed. I can't — I'm usually at the other end of the cursing.

RACHEL. I think you got some of this stuff on the blouses.

JILL. Not that it would do much good. *Whatever* you did. It wouldn't take away the curse.

RACHEL. *You* are the curse. Coming in here — destroying this place just because you didn't know how to wash a blouse.

JILL. The curse *is* ... Do you want to know what the curse is?

RACHEL. *Yes — Please —* Tell me what the damn curse is and then get the hell out of here. *(She examines blouses, brushing confetti off them.)*

JILL. The *damn* curse — is not going to get the *hell* out of here. The *hell* will stay in ... here — *(Pause.) Things ... will ... fall off.* That's it. Things will fall off.

RACHEL. Thank you. Now would you mind leaving?

JILL. Things will ...

RACHEL. Fall off — I heard you. Would you leave? I'm going to call the police — *and* — *(She goes to phone.)* I'm going to call the owner — *(She opens notebook.)*

JILL. Monique.

RACHEL. Yes. And don't try to sneak a look at her number. *(She covers phone dial.)*

JILL. Tell her things will — *fall off. Blouses* — tell her blouses will — *fall* — off hangers — *Tags* will fall off blouses — *Sizes* will fall off collars — *Doors* — will fall — off — *hinges* — at — inopportune times — *Boxes off shelves* — *phones off desks* — and ... *things* ... of ... yours — will fall — *off* — yes — be *warned* — no, it's too late to be warned — be prepared — things will fall — off ... first *buttons* — off *your* non-shrinking cotton blouse — *(She touches button.)* The *name tag* — *(She touches it.)* the cotton *itself* — *(Touches.)* and then ... other things — *(Touches Rachel's breast.)* will fall — off — *(Rachel covers breast and steps back.)*

RACHEL. Will you fall off — get off — get out?

JILL. Goodbye ... I'm taking my blouse.

RACHEL. Take it. Go.

JILL. I'll give it to my sister. It may fit her five-year-old ... Her name is ... Cindy ... She's cute as a button — I'll tell my sister not to wash it — just let the kid wear it till it disintegrates — with dirt — *(Goes to door.)* Or — Or if she *does* wash it by mistake — Cindy